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ABSTRACT

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Running Head: ETHICS AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Morals, Ethics and the Campus Community: Implications for Student Development

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Abstract

Moral education is an issue that higher education has often avoided. This paper begins with a critical review of the role higher education institutions have taken in the moral education of students and how that role relates to institutional mission. It continues by proposing an educationally defensible moral and ethical standard and finally focuses on the role the student development professional can take in the moral education of students.

Morals, Ethics, and the Campus Community: Implications for Student Development

The role of the university in the moral education of its students is a question that has troubled student affairs professionals for many years. The depth and extent of that role is an issue that continues to be debated. Despite the traditional view that morality is best taught in the home and place of worship, there has been a societal trend to make training in morality and ethics a responsibility of educational institutions (Stamatakos & Stamatakos, 1980). Critics of higher education decry current moral values and view the academy as a place where "The purpose of higher education appears to be anything for everybody" (Stamatakos & Stamatakos, 1980, p. 58), and freedom has been separated from responsibility (Billington, 1991; Bloom, 1987).

Is this criticism justified? I believe in many cases it is. Moral education is an issue that higher education has often at best paid lip service to and at worst avoided. In this paper I will discuss the role of higher education institutions in the moral education of students and how that role relates to institutional mission. I will then propose a moral and ethical standard and finally focus on the role the student development professional plays in moral education.

Role of Higher Education Institutions in Moral Education

There are rejoinders that universities do not hold the major share of the blame for the current moral state of affairs and should not be expected to be the major solution; the primary role of the university is academic and intellectual (Billington, 1991). Universities do, however, not only have a place in moral education of students; they have a responsibility for that education. Stamatakos and Stamatakos (1980) note that "Moral and ethical values cannot become truly manifest in a student's behavior until the student has cognitively derived

and tested those values in total learning environments which manifest and support . . . ethical and moral behavior" (p. 73). In general, institutions of higher education in this country agree with this statement, at least in theory. It is common to find some statement mentioning the importance of preparing students for social responsibility, moral awareness, leadership in the community, or enhancing citizenship skills within mission statements (Astin, 1992; Caswell, 1991; Pascarella, Ethington & Smart, 1988; Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992).

Nevertheless, despite formal commitments through vehicles such as mission statements, there is little evidence that higher education is at all concerned with developing citizenship skills. Astin (1991) notes that "Even though our college catalogs and mission statements often mention such things as citizenship and social responsibility, it is difficult to find much in the curriculum of any college or university that seems to reflect such a value. For that matter, the modern college curriculum seems to pay little attention to the development of many other potentially important qualities such as honesty, social responsibility, self-understanding, tolerance, empathy and the like" (p. 109).

Given the importance of the mission statement in defining an institution's expectations and conveying its educational purposes to its constituency, there should be little wonder at the confusion and criticism created by doing one thing and saying another. Kuh (1993) distinguishes between espoused and enacted values. Espoused values are assertions made by an institution about aspirations, although Kuh notes that these values may not reflect the experiences of parts of the academic community. Enacted values drive policy and decision-making. Again, Kuh notes there is often a difference between what is said and what is done.

The lack of direction in moral education in this nation's colleges and universities appears to stem from a conflict between the wish to make some kind of commitment and the need for academic integrity. Significant questions are asked by those concerned about academic integrity. Moral education is important, but whose morals are to be taught? What values are to be emphasized? Judeo-Christian? Humanistic? Eastern? The possibilities are limitless, but realistically no established value system is totally acceptable to all parties. The result is a supposed value neutrality that purports to support academic inquiry. The problem is that there is no activity on a college or university campus that is value free! All staff, administration and faculty members carry their values and act on them in every interaction or duty in which they are involved. The outcome is that "ethical and moral learning takes place without overt discussion and examination and constitutes a 'hidden curriculum'. Students learn by watching what we do and say, or fail to do and say, in response to ethical issues and dilemmas" (Perlman, 1982, p. 6). I believe we do our students a disservice by failing to commit to a position, both individually and as an institution.

Moral Standards

There is an important related developmental issue involved in this process. Students come to college with the value system they have grown up with; then they are confronted by both the open and hidden curricula and the myriad of values present on a college campus. A first year student's value system is often shaken to its core. I believe this is an appropriate and necessary part of the college experience, and exploration of values should be encouraged. However, to promote the critical evaluation and challenging of one's value system without providing the support for restructuring a set of adult value commitments is indefensible

(Sandalow, 1991). Colleges and universities believe that some kind of education in values, ethics and morals is important and necessary but are unwilling or unable to identify and commit to an ethical system.

The solution to this apparent dilemma may be on our own campuses and within our own professional field. Boyer (1990), in his call for redefining campus community, notes that "a community of learning, at its best, is guided by standards of student conduct that define acceptable behavior and integrate the academic and non-academic dimensions of life" (p. 37). He states further that a college should be "a place where individuals acknowledge their obligations to the group" (p. 44). Student development professionals agree that the learning community extends into the residence halls, and that the establishment of a student community within the residence halls themselves is a vital part of the total higher education experience (Decoster & Mable, 1980). Student development professionals also believe that student misbehavior can seriously affect and damage the learning community. For a college or university, immoral behavior can be defined as that which damages the community, the individual, and the learning environment. This definition is defensible, both philosophically and legally. It supports the academic and service mission common to colleges and universities. It is a commitment to a standard of behavior that enhances the goals of higher education, and transfers well to the greater social community.

Role of Student Development Professionals

As can be seen from the previous literature review, ethics and morals on the college campus has been the subject of considerable discussion and commentary in recent years. Nevertheless, most of what has been written and discussed has either been philosophical in

nature or directed at very senior administrative and academic faculty and staff. These discussions are important in that they suggest higher education is beginning to critically evaluate its position. Yet they have failed to ground the philosophical arguments and promote strategies for effecting change in the campus community.

Student development professionals in general have an obligation to "acquire a broader knowledge of the patterns of late adolescent development to positively influence individual student's growth and achievement and especially the subsequent development of a mature ethical self-awareness. Such knowledge is essential for the establishment and maintenance of a learning community environment" (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992, p. 44). Of any group of associates on a college campus, student development professionals have the best opportunity and most appropriate training to influence student development (Pascarella, et. al., 1988). The theme of much of the training student development professionals receive is in taking philosophical and theoretical concepts and applying those to a population. This involves grounding and operationalizing sometimes esoteric concepts to develop strategies that will effect change. The same process can apply to moral and ethical education. There are risks involved here. There are campus constituencies, which will probably object for some of the reasons mentioned earlier in this paper, for example, "value-free" education. If the strategies, however, are developed from and related to the institutional mission, and coincide with the moral standard presented in this paper, I believe they will be defensible as educational goals.

Specific goals and strategies are going to depend upon the institution. Mission, size, public/private status, religious affiliation, and campus population are all significant factors in

designing interventions. As a springboard for discussion, however, six suggestions and areas for thought are listed below.

Ethics statements. It is worthwhile to spend time reading and refamiliarizing oneself with the ethics statements prepared by professional organizations such as the American College Personnel Association, National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, or the Association of College and University Housing Officers. The ethics statements of these professional organizations fall naturally into the moral standard discussed earlier in this paper.

Familiarity with the ethical commitments of one's profession can be a powerful support in discussions with campus colleagues, and can also educate them in the positions commonly taken by student development professionals. There is a common knowledge of the Hippocratic Oath of the medical profession, how many faculty and staff members know about the ethic statements of student development professionals?

Discussion of these statements, and how they figure into ethical decision-making could also be a regular part of professional staff training and development within one's department. Translating the written word into real world situations can be difficult. Ethical decision-making is a learned art and must be practiced!

Departmental values. Examine the espoused and enacted values of one's department. Are the department's philosophy and the department's actions congruent? Open discussion of this congruency, or lack thereof, is essential to bring these values in line.

A means of accomplishing this is by rigorously evaluating department and institutional mission statements as part of regular planning, assessment and accreditation

cycles. It can be vitally important, both ethically and politically, to volunteer one's services for committees formed to examine these issues. Such meetings often determine the future of an institution. Hidden agendas and political issues abound, but consider the consequences--failure to develop congruency contributes to the campus' hidden curriculum and to the moral confusion of students.

Learning centered management. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) note that over decades higher education has changed it's management priorities in an understandable response to declining enrollments, budget cuts and other challenges. These priorities have moved higher education more towards institutional survival and less towards education and the welfare of students.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) propose that administrators begin to shift towards "learning centered management, an orientation that systematically takes into account the potential consequences of alternative courses of administrative action for student learning" (p. 656). This is not a request to put on the proverbial rose-colored glasses; institutional survival is obviously important. What they are asking is for administrators to insert a step in the decision-making process.

For student development professionals, this means integrating developmental theory into the decision-making process by asking the question: "How will this decision affect students developmental environment and opportunities?". Asking oneself this question during the daily management and decision-making processes is an important reality check. It forces a refocusing on institutional mission and professional goals.

Student behavior. Colleges and universities spend extensive amounts of time dealing with student discipline; to the point where several professional staff members may be assigned this as their specific function. These staff members, most commonly found in Dean of Students offices and Departments of Residence Life, operate on the assumption that student discipline should be educational in nature (Williamson, 1961; Wrenn, 1951). This assumption has not been adequately tested, and indeed, student development professionals have little research data on which to rely that deals specifically with student misbehavior (Chassey, 1999). Other areas of student development practice are anchored on a solid foundation of research and theory. It is difficult to improve practice unless that foundation exists. Dannells (1991) in a ten year study found little or no change in institutional responses to student misbehavior. He noted that "more attention should be given . . . to translating developmental theory into disciplinary practice and, in our research, to developing process models to aid that in that translation" (p.169).

Knowledge of a student's level of cognitive development, and more specifically, an individual's level of moral judgment has significant implications for the design of a developmental intervention for that student (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Hedin, 1979). More research should be done in this crucial area of student development in order to provide the foundation for practice. Research areas including aggressive and anti-social behavior, juvenile delinquency, and academic cheating hold promising concepts for understanding behavior. Intervention studies specifically aimed at student behavior management also may be implemented to expand our knowledge.

Disciplinary process. A related issue regards the student disciplinary and behavior management process. Does this process reflect educational goals, or is it overly bureaucratic and legalistic? The requirements imposed by the courts as necessary to observe due process in campus disciplinary cases are not particularly onerous. Constitutional due process can be achieved in a simple, streamlined system that focuses on education and behavior change (Mary M. v. Clark, 1984).

Many institutions, however, have lost sight of the teachable moment in student discipline. Unfortunately, student discipline courts have become more training grounds for law students than vehicles for overall student development due to an overemphasis on bureaucratic and legalistic procedures (Sc.π & Taber, 1987). A prime example is a recent model judicial code that does not once mention the concept of an educational or developmental effect on a college student in 32 pages of text. The emphasis of this model code is "to ensure smooth administration" of the disciplinary process (Stoner & Cerminara, 1990, p. 91).

Smooth administration is not the original intent or philosophy behind this aspect of student development practice. Common experience dictates that effective behavior management should be relatively quick in it's application, personal, educational, and not punitive unless absolutely necessary to preserve the campus community. Disciplinary systems, like all administrative procedures, benefit from regular assessment and critical evaluation to remain effective and true to educational mission.

Programming. The final, and seemingly most obvious, suggestion is programming around moral and ethical issues on campuses and in residence halls. Programs and activities

that foster critical discussion of issues or enhance opportunities for student leadership are particularly effective in promoting ethical development and critical thinking skills. (Pascarella, et. al., 1988; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Conclusion

These suggestions are not by any means all-encompassing, and should only be considered as a starting point for approaching the issue of moral and ethical development. Promoting moral and ethical development will be a challenge. Nevertheless, if student development professionals accept the idea that colleges and universities have the mission of preparing students for leadership and social responsibility, it is imperative that values clarification, critical decision-making, and commitment to moral positions be encouraged among our students. The alternative can be terrifying. Examples of unethical, immoral leadership abound in history; at best scandals in Congress, at the very worst the specter of the Holocaust. Work in student development is important because typically the college or university is the last chance for the educational process to have an impact on young adults before they enter society. We have the opportunity to make a difference. With this opportunity I believe comes a responsibility to use the development of residence hall and campus communities as a means to further the ethical and moral education of students.

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